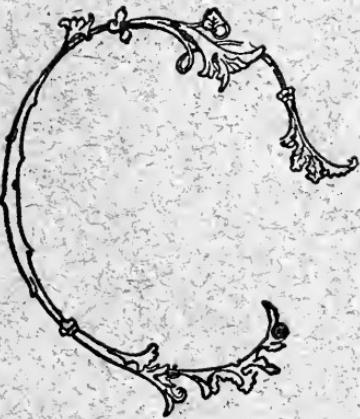


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The Great Idea

—BY—

LAURA M. ADAMS



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FRANKLIN, OHIO **DENVER, COLO.**

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CHARACTERS

THE LIVE-WIRE CLUB—Seven members.

MISS MILBURNE, who rents a room to the boys for a club room. (Taken by boy if desired.)

THE PROFESSOR, who boards with Miss Milburne.

MARY, the colored maid. (Taken by boy if desired.)

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no 1

The Great Idea

ACT I.

Scene—The Live-Wire club room. Boys scatterea about in various positions.

ED—Well, boys, I move you that we decide tonight where we are going to spend our summer vacation.

MILTON—That's right, Ed, we've been putting that matter off too long. We want a bully place this year.

HERBERT—Let's go in for a two-weeks' hike, boys.

GILBERT—Nothing doing. I have to do errands all year after school. Me for a hammock, a book and a shady tree.

ARTHUR—Lazy as ever, hey, Gilbert? Hark, somebody's knocking. (*Knock on door. Mary enters with a tray of sandwiches. Boys scramble for tray, helping themselves.*)

MARY—(*laughing*) Well, now, I jess guess Missy Milburne wus right.

WALTER—Sure, she was right. She's always right. (*Munches sandwich.*)

MARY—She said as how she guessed you boys'd be hungry, and a few sandwiches wouldn't go noways bad.

FRED—You tell her for me, she's a brick, Mary.

ED, MILTON, HERBERT—Me, too, Mary.

GILBERT—Amen! Them's my sentiments, fair maid.

MARY—(*pattting hair and smiling*) Faih maid. Come, now, Mistah Gilbert. Do you really think I've any call to good looks?

GILBERT—Sure thing, Mary mine. You're the prettiest girl I've seen tonight.

MARY—(*roguishly*) You ain't done seen any mo' tonight, Mistah Gil.

(All laugh and Gilbert dodges a cap that Herbert throws at him.)

ARTHUR—Be sure your sins will find you out, Gil.

MARY—(starting for door) Well, have a good time, boys, but don't git gay. (Goes out and shuts door.)

WALTER—Some girl, that. But say—Miss Milburne's mighty white to give us these handouts so often. She's not charging us much for the rent of this room—and I don't think she's any too well fixed, either.

FRED—No, I guess the Professor's board helps out a lot. He's a funny old duffer, but she seems to think a lot of him.

ED—Yes, I've a kind of a sneaking notion (*in lowered tone*) that Miss Milburne's hard hit.

MILTON—Stuff and nonsense. She's hard hit for his board, that's all. (He jumps as someone knocks at door. Herbert opens door.)

HERBERT—Why, it's Miss Milburne. Come in, Miss Milburne and let us tell you how much we enjoyed your treat. (Pulls a chair forward for her. She sits down, nervously wiping her eyes.)

GILBERT—I say, Miss Milburne, is anything the matter?

MISS M.—(*tearfully*) The matter—Oh, boys, I'm in deep trouble.

ARTHUR—Can we help you out, Miss Milburne?

MISS M.—Oh, I don't know—I don't know. (Wringing her hands.) I was coming down the hall a few minutes ago and met the Professor leaving his room.

WALTER—What's up? Is he going to be married?

MISS M.—(*horrified*) Oh, no, it isn't as bad as that. (Boys exchange knowing looks.)

FRED—Cheer up, then, Miss Milburne. As Munyan says: "while there's life there's hope." (Dramatic pose.)

MISS M.—(*smiling faintly*) You cheer me in spite of myself. Well, as I was saying, I met him in the hall and he says he is going to leave.

ED—Going to leave! The old humbug! Doesn't he like the eats? He doesn't know when he is well off.

MISS M.—(*bridling*) Oh, no, it wasn't anything like that. He has always been most satisfied with my table. No, he says he is going abroad!

MILTON AND HERBERT—Going abroad!

GILBERT—How in the mischief can he leave his job of professoring?

MISS M.—He tells me that he has quite unexpectedly come into money—I ought to be glad for him (*tearfully*) —and he is going to see the things that he has read about, but never dreamed of seeing.

ARTHUR—But he ought not to go alone, Miss Milburne. Couldn't you—ah—make him see that?

MISS M.—(*hopefully*) I hadn't thought of that. I hadn't thought of anything. I came right in here to you boys.

WALTER—Quite right, Miss Milburne. It's about time we were sprucing up and paying you back for all the spreads you've given us. You just give us a little time and we'll map out a plan of attack.

MISS M.—Plan of attack! Oh, boys, don't do anything rash. The Professor isn't any too strong—

FRED—None too strong? All the more reason he should not travel alone.

ED—(*coming over to Miss M.*) Miss Milburne, will you promise to do just as we tell you to do if we find a way to help you?

MISS M.—Well—well—

GILBERT—He who hesitates is lost. The victory's ours, boys. Now, we'll enlist the fair maid, Mary, and the deed is done. Away, away, Miss Milburne, while we lay our plot. No harm you know, and a husband and Europe for you.

MISS M.—(*rising and smiling*) I'm sure I don't see how you're going to plan to win the Professor—

ARTHUR—Leave that to us, dear Miss Milburne.

MILTON—(*escorting her to the door*) All you have to do, Miss Milburne, is what every woman hates to do, I know: do as you're told. This time it's for your everlasting betterment, and for the Professor's too, only he doesn't know it.

(*Exit Miss M.*)

WALTER—No more summer plans for us tonight, boys, not when real romance is staring us in the face.

FRED—(*drawing chairs closer together*) Come on, fellows, I've got the big idea! It's been forming for five minutes—real melodrama! Make sure the doors and windows are closed. Mum's the word.

ED—Three cheers for Fred. He always did have a big head.

MILTON—Yes, and nothin' in it. (*Dodges a pillow that Fred throws at him.*)

HERBERT—Come on, Fred. I'm dead with curiosity. Come on with the big idea.

CURTAIN



ACT II.

Scene—Same as Act I. Boys seated about room, except Milton who is just entering door.

ED—How about it, Milt? Got it all arranged?

MILTON—Fine as silk. Mary fell for it like a lamb. I had a little trouble convincing Miss Milburne, but when I promised her that I would really play the part of the—

HERB.—Sh—the Professor might be coming.

MILTON—(*glancing toward door*) That's so. Well, when she heard that she said that she wouldn't be telling an actual falsehood, and she'd try to see it through.

ARTHUR—(*throwing cap in air*) Hurrah for the fun, then. The Professor's due here any time, now, isn't he? (*Glancing at watch.*) There's his step in the hall, now. Go to it there, Walter.

WALTER—(*opening door*) Howdy, Professor. Haven't seen you for a month.

PROF.—(*notebook under arm, enters and shakes hands with boys*) It has been quite a while since I've been in to one of your meetings, boys. Glad to see you again—very glad indeed.

FRED—We're glad to see you, too, Professor, but—(*looking anxiously at him*) Why, Professor, what ails you anyway? You've fallen off twenty pounds.

PROF.—(*sitting down suddenly*) What's that, Fred? Fallen off twenty pounds! Oh, come now, Fred; you're only joking.

FRED—Sure thing, Professor. Never saw such a change in anybody in my life.

PROF.—(*looking around at other boys*) You hadn't noticed it, too, had you, boys?

MILTON—(*seriously*) Well, Professor, I don't like to be a Calamity Jane, and if Fred here hadn't spoken—I—ah—(*hesitates*)

PROF.—(*wiping his forehead*) The truth, Milton, the truth.

MILTON—Well, then, I was thinking to myself, sir, when Fred spoke, that you were looking pretty seedy, sir, pretty seedy.

ED—(*shaking head and speaking to Herbert*) So pale—so very pale.

HERBERT—Chalky—actually chalky.

PROF.—(*quite overcome*) Well, the truth is, boys, I do not feel like myself at all. I am completely worn out.

GILBERT—You don't have to tell us; we can see it.

FRED—Why, you are actually trembling. Perhaps you have Angemima Pectoris—or something like that—it means a wobbly heart, anyhow.

PROF.—(*hand to heart*) Yes, it is beating quite violently now. I guess I am really a sick man.

MILTON—(*patting him on back*) You'll have to take things a bit easier, now, Professor. That's all.

PROF.—(*brightening*) I am planning to do that, boys. It is so kind of you to have my welfare at heart. I have come into a fortune most unexpectedly from a deceased cousin, and I am going abroad.

ED—Going abroad! The very thing you need.

ARTHUR—Finest thing for a shaky heart.

MILTON—Best tonic imaginable. But Professor—you're not going alone?

PROF.—Why, I hadn't thought of taking anyone with me—indeed, I had not thought of my health at all—

HERBERT—Until you came in here. Well, perhaps it's the best thing you ever did in your life, Professor—to have found yourself out in time.

GILBERT—To die alone on shipboard!

PROF.—(*gasping*) Horrible!

WALTER—There, there, Professor, it isn't as bad as that.

FRED—if you could only find some nice congenial person—someone to sort of look after you, your troubles would all be solved.

PROF.—(*getting up feebly*) Boys, you have given me food for thought. I will go now and rest a while.

(*Milton slips out unobserved by Prof., but seen by audience.*)

ARTHUR—(*picking up fallen notebook*) You'll be all right, Professor, when you get hold of somebody to look after you—to sort of mother you—

PROF.—(*starting back*) Kind of what, young man?

HERBERT—(*poking Arthur to say no more*) Never mind, Professor, you just go on and rest awhile. Stop in and see us again.

PROF.—(*gripping Herbert's hand*) Thank you my boy. You are all very kind to have my interests so at heart. I will stop in again. Good night. (*Exit, shutting door.*)

GILBERT—(*clapping hands softly*) Working like a charm, hey, boys? Now for the fun.

WALTER—Milton got away without his seeing him, all right. He'll make a first-rate— (*The door bursts open and the Prof. rushes in, his face very white; sinks into chair and pants audibly.*)

ED—(*all crowding about Prof.*) What's up, Professor? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.

PROF.—Seen a ghost! Worse than that. I've been robbed!

HERBERT—What? You robbed?

GILBERT—What did they get, Professor?

PROF.—(*weakly*) My watch and chain that my deceased cousin left me, and my purse. I only laid the things on my bureau before I came in here.

ARTHUR—(*starting for door*) Let's form a searching party, boys—it hasn't been long since—

(*Just at this point a scream is heard in distance—then Mary's voice.*)

MARY—(*outside*) Stop, thief! Stop, thief! Oh, Missy Milburne, he'll kill you! (*Door opens just as the boys are rushing to open it, and Mary runs in and drops in a heap on the floor, wailing. Boys rush down hall, Prof. anxiously peering out door.*)

MARY—Oh, my pore Missy Milburne. Professah, Professah, she done do it all fo' you, sah—all fo' you.

PROF.—(*turning to Mary in bewilderment*) What are you talking about, Mary? Did Miss Milburne see the thief?

MARY—See him? Co'se she done see him. So did I—but when I done see him, he couldn't see me fo' dust.

PROF.—(*impatiently*) But, Miss Milburne, Mary—what of her?

MARY—Well, aftah I done saw the thief runnin' thoo the pantry, I shooed up the stairs, but just as I reached the top, I done think about Missy Milburne bein' out in the shed alone—mah hair wus on end, Professah, but I jess had to go down again fo' that deah lady's sake—and bless youah heart, Professah, when I got to the

shed she was fightin' like mad wid dat theif until he done drop that money and watch and dust!

PROF.—(*shuddering*) Poor woman—she might have been killed.

MARY—Yes, sah, so she might. 'Taint many wimmin (*slyly*) would o' done the like of that fo' jest one of her bo'ders. Seems lak she must o' keered a heap fo' you, Professah.

PROF.—Well, I surely regard Miss Milburne most highly, Mary.

MARY—Yes, sah, I reckon you do. We all do. Well, you surely kin lay down in her house and know you's well taken keer of. Ain't no wimmen lak her. She's better'n a man.

(*Sounds in hall. Boys are returning, Milton bringing up the rear with Miss Milburne leaning heavily on his arm.*)

GILBERT—(*handing Prof. his valuables*) Here, Professor, are your things, returned by the bravest lady in the land.

(*Prof. takes watch and purse and advances toward Miss M., whom Mary has seated in the arm chair. Miss M. is smiling wanly.*)

PROF.—How can I ever thank you enough, my dear Miss Milburne? You have rescued these things at the risk of your life.

MISS M.—Don't mention it, Professor. To be sure, he was a pretty sizeable fellow. (*Mary pokes Milton and doubles up in silent merriment.*) And I wouldn't want to meet him every day in the week.

PROF.—You are the bravest woman I ever met.

(*Herbert looks at Arthur, who whispers "We've won."*)

WALTER—It must have tuckered you all out though, Miss Milburne. You need a week's vacation to rest up and get your nerves in proper shape.

FRED—A week! She deserves a year. Think of it!

He might have killed the Professor if he hadn't been in here—

MARY—He might have burned the hull house down, wid de hull congregation in it—no tellin' whar dem cheap white trash thieves will stop at.

(*All laugh and Miss Milburne rises.*)

MISS M.—Well, boys, I feel a little better now, and will go down and get the Professor's tea ready—he must have his cup of tea before retiring.

PROF.—(*hand on her arm*) Cup of tea! Do not think of it tonight, dear friend, after all this excitement. You go and lie down yourself.

MISS M.—Nonsense. I am all right. I could not rest if I thought you were not comfortable. (*She goes out, followed by Mary.*)

HERBERT—Such consideration!

GILBERT—You will go far, Professor, before you'll find another boarding place like this one, I'm thinking.

FRED—It isn't the boarding place—it's Miss Milburne. She'd make anything comfortable, from a palace to a cabin.

PROF.—(*starting up*) A cabin—a cabin—ah—that reminds me of my trip—

ED—Yes, you were going to decide about taking someone along with you, Professor.

GILBERT—Did it ever occur to you to take a WIFE along, Professor?

PROF.—(*jumping*) A WIFE! Where under the sun would I get a wife? I am out at college all day—here every evening at my desk.

MILTON—But your life is going to be very different now, Professor. You are going to be out in the world—to travel extensively—you need a woman's hand to—to—

WALTER—To pack your suitcase.

MILTON—(*gratefully*) True, Walter, and a woman's heart to "mother" you, and to look after your welfare as MISS MILBURN does here, you know.

PROF.—Miss Milburne—Miss Milburne—boys! I have it! I have it!

FRED—Have what, Professor? The Great Idea?

PROF.—Exactly. Who could look after my interests better than the dear woman who saved my life today? (*dramatically.*)

ARTHUR—Well, now, why didn't we think of her before?

HERBERT—Just like a gang of stupid boys. The very one, Professor. Go to it before she retires. Know your fate tonight. (*Pushes him toward door.*)

PROF.—My heart! It is beating very fast. I wonder what is the cause of it.

FRED—SHE is the cause of it. I'll bet that's where your Angemima Pectoris or wobbly heart comes from—you've been pining for Miss Milburne and didn't know it.

PROF.—Perhaps you are right, Fred—by jingo, I do believe you are.

MILTON—Steady there, Professor. Never heard you use slang before. When a man's in love—(*shakes head.*)

(*Exit Prof.*)

PROF.—(*popping head in door*) I will return and let you know if I am successful, boys.

ARTHUR—Do, by all means, Professor. Good luck to you. (*Door closes.*)

ED—(*as boys laugh quietly*) Well, if he isn't some shorn lamb!

HERBERT—Played right into our hands all right.

GILBERT—I'd like to be a mouse right now. Wonder how the old fellow will pop the question.

MILTON—Mary must have started things going all right, when she burst in on him and told him about the robbery. (*Knock at door. Enter Mary, doubled up with laughter.*)

MARY—Oh, boys, it's took—it's took.

FRED—What's took? Is he vaccinating her, Mary?

MARY—Wus'n dat, Mistah Fred. He done git down

on his knees to propose to her—I done see him thoo de keyhole. And Missy Milburne jess fell on his neck. I guess she jess wep' fo' joy. Ha'k! Heah dey come. Hide me! Hide me! (*Hides behind couch or chair. Emerges from time to time and joins at last in singing.*)

PROF.—(*coming in with Miss Milburne on arm, both smiling happily*) Well, boys, behold my future bride. We are going to be married at the end of the week and sail before the month's out. Speak up, my dear, and tell them I am right. Do not be bashful.

MISS M.—Yes, dear boys, it is all true, although quite like a dream yet.

(*Boys all offer congratulations, shake hands, etc.*)

MISS M.—You are such trustworthy boys and have always served me well. Therefore, when we leave I shall give you a key and you can come in and out of your club room at will—and rent free.

MILTON—That is too much for us to expect, Miss Milburne.

MISS M.—Not at all—and I know the Professor agrees with me. We shall not forget you when we arrive in Europe, either, shall we, Professor?

PROF.—Indeed not. I shall always be in your debt, boys. Perhaps, if it had not been for you, I should never have discovered my—ah—affection for Miss Milburne. (*Glances at her devotedly.*)

HERBERT—Well, we are surely glad to have been of any help. Come on boys, let's give them a send-off for tonight, and then away to dream of the Professor's Great Idea.

(*All sing to the tune of the "Stein Song."*)

Oh, it's all's well that ends well,
When good fellows get together,
With a cheer for Professor,
And a handshake for his Bride—
Yes, we truly and gladly
Shall wish you the bestest ever.
Spare a thought for the Live-Wires,
When you reach the other side.

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number
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If Santa Shouldn't Come To Me
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When Daddy Took Me Up
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one
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